A FAREWELL

SERMON

Preach'd at the

PARISH CHURCH

OF

St. *Bartholomew* the Little,

Near the *Royal-Exchange*,

ON

SUNDAY, *January* 26, 1724.

By ZACHARY PEARCE, M.A.
Vicar of St. Martin's in the Fields, and
Chaplain in Ordinary to His Majesty.

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To the Worthy

INHABITANTS

Of the PARISH of

St. *Bartholomew*, &c.

THIS

SERMON,

Printed at their earneſt Deſire and Requeſt, and deſign'd for their ſole Uſe and Benefit,

Is Dedicated and Preſented, as a Token of Gratitude and Affection,

By their late Rector,

and very much Oblig'd

Friend and Servant,

Z. PEARCE.

Acts xx. 32.

And now, Brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of his Grace, which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance amongst all them which are sanctified.

THE Great Apostle of the Gentiles, St. *Paul*, having for the space of three Years carefully labour'd in the Work of converting and instructing the *Ephesians*, and being about to leave them at the end of that Time, and to visit the Church of *Jerusalem*, called together the Elders of the Church at *Ephesus*, and in a long, a moving and an affectionate Discourse, of which the Text is a

First, gave them many useful Words of Advice, and recommended them in the most solemn manner to the Blessing of God, and to the Advantages which a steady Discharge of the Duties of the Gospel was sure to intitle them to. I pretend not, from this Account which I have given you of the Occasion of the Words in the Text, to draw any Parallel between that excellent Apostle and the Author of this present Discourse to you my Hearers. I have neither his miraculous Gifts, nor his excellent Natural Abilities; there is neither in Me that Foundation of Authority which he had among them, as they were converted by him to Christianity, nor is there in You that Reason for Sorrow and Grief at parting which they then felt, when he told them that they should *see his face no more*. However it may be observ'd, that the Time of his Ministry among the *Ephesians*, and of mine among You, is something resembling in the length of it, and both of us have this in common, that, as he did then, so do I now leave a Society of Christians endear'd to me on many Accounts, who have paid a willing and attentive Regard to my Labours; to whose farther Instruction in Religion I may reasonably believe, that I have in some measure contributed, and among whom I may confidently affirm, that I have had no Enmity, no Dispute, no decrease of Affection towards any one single Person: in a word, whose Behaviour to me has given me no Uneasiness, except in that they have been an Over-match for me

in Civilities, and that it has not been ſo much in my Power, as it was in my Wiſh, to make equal Returns for the many Effects of Kindneſs that I have received: But the Occaſion and Circumſtances of the Words in the Text are not ſo worthy of your Obſervation, as the Matter which the Words contain in them: and which may be branched out into theſe two Propoſitions, *viz.*

[I.] That *the word of God's grace*, i. e. the Goſpel, is able to perfect Chriſtians in the Diſcharge of their Duty in this Life; for this is that which St. *Paul* means by the Expreſſion in the Text, *which is able to build you up.*

[II.] That it will entitle them to eternal Happineſs in Heaven hereafter; which is the purport of St. *Paul*'s Words, when he ſays, *and to give you an Inheritance among all them which are ſanctify'd.*

In each of theſe Propoſitions there is included no ſmall Panegyrick upon the Goſpel; the Firſt implies its great Uſefulneſs in qualifying us for Happineſs; the Second its great Ability in procuring us that Happineſs; the former promiſes the Means, the latter the Reward; in a word, the one points out to us the Road in which we are to walk, and the other carries our View farther, and ſhews us at a Diſtance that Place of Entertainment, where if our Journey brings us, we ſhall be happy beyond Expreſſion to all Eternity.

I ſhall therefore conſider each of theſe Propoſitions ſeparately, and that not with ſtrict regard to any Rules of Method, but rather in that free and unaffected Way, in which Friends at parting are wont to expreſs their Concern for thoſe whom they leave, when they hope to imprint their laſt Advices upon them in the deepeſt manner that they can. As to the

[1.] Propoſition therefore, which is, that the Goſpel is able to perfect Chriſtians in the Diſcharge of their Duty in this Life, I ſhall conſider the Goſpel as containing in it three things,

1. What we are to believe,
2. What we are to practiſe,
3. The Motives and Encouragements, which it gives us towards the Diſcharge of our Duty. And

1. §. With reſpect to what we are to believe, you may remember, that I have on many Occaſions laid before you the whole Scheme of the Chriſtian Religion, as diſtinguiſh'd from Natural Religion. I have often told you, that Natural Religion is the Ground-work of it, and is always ſuppos'd to be the Duty of Men, to be unalterable and eternal: But that as Natural Religion was deſign'd for innocent and upright Creatures, and as all Creatures have more or leſs deviated and gone aſide from their intended Uprightneſs, the Chriſtian Religion was introduc'd into the World on purpoſe to rectify theſe Diſorders, and to procure for Men Pardon and Reconciliation, with that God whom they had offended. In view of this there-

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fore you must steadfastly believe, that Jesus was the Christ or Messias sent upon this Errand, and charg'd with this Commission from God; and that so Important a Commission could not be laid upon or executed by any one, who was less than God, (I speak here of Christ consider'd in his divine and human Nature join'd together); for as *Repentance towards God* was preach'd up by the Apostles, so they always added to it *Faith in Jesus Christ*, as a Belief necessary for every one who wou'd be saved. And as this was the main Spring, and the first Mover in the Christian Religion, so many things which were Consequences of this are to be receiv'd as the Objects of a Christian's Faith: Such are the mysterious Incarnation of our Saviour, his Miracles, his Resurrection and Ascension, the Descent of the Holy Ghost, and the extraordinary Gifts which were bestow'd upon the Apostles and other Believers in the first Age of Christianity. These, and all the necessary Articles of our Belief, are comprehended in the Creeds commonly receiv'd and frequently read in the Service of our Church. Beware therefore how you admit any others, such as those which the Church of *Rome* has added, resting upon little or no Authority, but the pretended Infallibility of their Church: they cannot prove them from Scripture, and therefore they are not necessary, if we may believe St. *Paul*, who in the Text tells you, that *the Word of Grace*, which is the Gospel, *is able to build you up*: but the *Roman* Church seems to have look'd upon this Building

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ing of the Gospel to be unfinish'd, and have therefore added (what I may be excus'd if I call) Out-offices to the Christian Religion, as large as the Building it self, for the Articles of Pope *Pius*'s Creed are as many in Number as those in the Apostle's Creed: So little Care of Proportion in the spiritual Building have those *Italians* had, who in other Buildings are justly reckon'd the best Architects and the truest Observers of Proportion. But (as I was saying) beware, I beseech you, how you admit any thing as matter of Faith, which is not expresly contain'd in Scripture, or which cannot by necessary Consequence be prov'd thereby. Consider that all the Articles of Belief have one steady View, in which they centre, and which is no other than to make us more easily believe, that thro' Christ Remission of Sins is to be obtain'd by repenting Sinners: there is indeed another Advantage (but a less direct and intended) Advantage in having these Articles of our Belief, namely, that we may not reckon our weak and frail Reason at too high a Rate, but that we may find how imperfect it is, by seeing that some things lye out of the reach of human Reason, either to discover or to conceive.

2. §. Another thing which the Gospel contributes towards the building up of Christians, is the Knowledge of what they are to practise: the Articles of Faith are the useful Ornaments, but the practical Duties are the material and substantial Parts of Religion: both are necessary to a good Building, and both (to carry on

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the Metaphor which St. *Paul* in the Text has begun) shew the good Contrivance and Wisdom of the divine Architect. The Gospel therefore contains the best Collection of Rules fitted for Practice of any Book extant: those Rules are laid down in the clearest Manner, and the easiest Words, deliver'd in the shortest Sentences, and founded upon the best Authority, being no less than that of a divine Lawgiver; There you will find that we are commanded to worship God in the most spiritual Manner, without any Incumbrance of superstitious Rites and Usages; there you will find that great Regard is had to the good of Society in general; That Men are forbidden all Intemperance, all Injustice, and all Uncharitableness; the three things which chiefly disturb Society, and make those who practise them unfit for serving the common Cause of Mankind: There you will read that we are commanded to love our Enemies, to forbear all Revenge, to do as we wou'd be done by, and in a Word to practise all those things, which visibly tend to make not only our selves, but others happy in this Life. The Gospel indeed is not a regular methodical System of all moral Duties; but the main Heads of all of them are laid down; and when the Spring is shown us, it is easy to trace out the several Streams flowing from it. I beseech you, be careful, very careful that your Lives are exactly answerable to the Rules which the Gospel contains: let not your Behaviour be fram'd by the Fashion of the World, and the Examples of those with whom you con-

verse; but consider rather that you are Followers of Christ and his Apostles; and look up frequently to the Pattern which they have set you. Ask your selves, before you engage in any unlawful or doubtful Action, whether your Saviour or his Apostles wou'd have acted thus; whether this or that Action wou'd have become them, or have consisted with what you know of their Behaviour: then you cannot, I think, easily deceive your selves, but will (to use the Words and Advice of St. *Paul* to the *Corinthians*) be *followers of him, as he also was of Christ*. As to the

3. Third thing which I said the Gospel contain'd, *viz.* such Motives and Encouragements as are proper to lead us to the Discharge of our Duty, there are many of these which are fitted in an extraordinary manner to influence Men towards Religion: for every Christian has in the first place the Pattern of his Saviour in his Life and Conversation recorded by the Evangelists: as *Christ was made like unto us in all things Sin only excepted*, so we have in him a standing Testimony of this Truth, that human Nature is capable of greater Perfection than we usually endeavour to arrive at: his Light so shines before us his Followers, that if we stumble, we stumble in broad Day, *i. e.* if we sin, we sin in the very Sight of that perfect Example which he has left us. Besides we have in the Gospel frequent Promises of the Grace and Assistance of God to direct us in our spiritual Affairs: there you may read that *he will not suffer you to be tempted above what*

you are able, that he will not leave nor forsake you, and that his *Grace is sufficient for you*. These and many more Promises of Help, given you by that God, who is both faithful and able to perform his Promises, are strong Encouragements to good Christians to endeavour after Perfection in Religion; upon such Props and such Foundations, as these are, may we not hope to build surely, and to erect such a spiritual Fabrick in our Hearts, as no Storms of this World can overthrow and ruin?

Upon the whole of this Argument therefore let it remain with you as a lasting Truth, that the *Word of* God's *Grace*, which is the Gospel, contains no slight Matter, no Rules of small Importance in it. It is able to build you up; the constant reading of it, and the steadfast adhering to it is walking by a sure Rule: it is the best Help, if rightly understood, which a Christian can have: Be diligent therefore, I beseech you, in Publick and Private, in the Church and in your Families, to read and attend to the glad Tidings, which it brings you; From thence instruct those who are committed your Charge, I mean those of your Families, in their Duty; open to them the sacred Springs, cause them to drink frequently of the *living Water* (as our Saviour calls his Doctrine); and be true to that Trust, which Heaven has given you, in the Care of their religious Behaviour and Instruction. But this is not all, which St. *Paul* in the Text attributes to the Gospel; for he adds,

[2.] That it *is able to give you an Inheritance among all them which are ſanctify'd*, i. e. it intitles you to the Happineſs of Heaven hereafter: this is the great Reward, the mighty Recompence which it brings to good Chriſtians; and the Happineſs of Heaven is ſuch a Bleſſing as we want Notions to conceive, as well as Words to expreſs: Oh! that I could here raiſe your Thoughts to a height equal to the Subject! that I could give you ſome true, tho' faint, Repreſentation of that Treaſure of Delights, which is there reſerv'd for every good Man! But ſpiritual things are not to be ſeen by the natural Sight; and things which are not ſeen, cannot be deſcrib'd diſtinctly: the Scriptures do indeed go as far as our Nature will permit, in painting the Joys of Heaven, and figure them out by Words expreſſing the greateſt Happineſs which we can conceive here on Earth: but after all they bid us to expect much more, by aſſuring us that *Eye hath not ſeen, nor Ear heard, neither hath it enter'd into the Heart of Man to conceive* what Pleaſures are there laid up in ſtore for the Righteous. And St. *Paul*, who had a View of that happy Place, declares himſelf unable to deſcribe it, or give any compleat Repreſentation of it. But we are aſſur'd, that the Pleaſures of it are great, and laſting; that they will know no Mixture, no Decay, as all human Pleaſures do: that they are not cloying and ſurfeiting as all earthly Satisfactions are: that the Paſſions of the Saints, who are Inhabitants there, are all of the eaſy and chearful Kind, ſuch as Love,

Praiſe, and Admiration: that the ſight of God is a perpetual Feaſt of Delight, and the Converſation with the bleſſed Saints and Angels is all ſuch as every one who enjoys it will reckon the higheſt Entertainment he can receive. Let this then be your conſtant Aim, let the Attainment of this Happineſs be always at the bottom of your Deſigns: Why ſhould you ſtoop from the Dignity of your Nature, from the Greatneſs of your Pretenſions as Chriſtians, to take up with preſent Happineſs only, which is of a much more mean, as well as an uncertain Nature? Remember (for it is highly your Intereſt to do ſo) remember, I ſay, that on this ſide the Grave there is nothing the Value of which can ſtand in Compariſon with that of Heaven. Overlook therefore, at leaſt regard with a leſs favourable Eye, all that your Senſes would flatter you with, all that a bad World would tempt you to: ſay within your ſelves —— No, we are born for higher Things and nobler Purpoſes: for God, and Religion, not for worldly Pleaſures, and the Gratification of our Senſes: for dwelling eternally in Heaven, not for taking up a laſting Abode here in this imperfect State. Take care therefore of your Souls more than your Bodies; of that which will laſt for ever, more than of that which is of a periſhing Nature.

Theſe and ſuch like Advices, my Brethren, are what I would leave with you, as the moſt important and moſt neceſſary to your Intereſt that can be offer'd: Of theſe things I have

frequently discours'd in the Course of my Ministry among you; sometimes I have endeavoured to lay the Reasons of your Duty before you in the plainest manner, and the most familiar Words; using you as reasonable Creatures by an Application to your Understanding, and by an Endeavour to make every Duty appear as clear and well grounded to you as it did to my self: at other times, when I thought the Fault lay rather in your Practice than in your Knowledge of some particular Duty, I endeavour'd, in the most moving manner that I could, to warm your Affections, and to rouze your Hopes and your Fears, those two great Leaders in Religion: I have always (and I can comfort my Heart with the Thought of it) deliver'd to you what I thought the Truth; whatever Subject I treated of, I constantly laid before you all the Arguments relating to it which I judg'd to be most Substantial, most Intelligible, and most Material. And I ever made it my Rule to chuse those Subjects for Discourse, which I thought were most useful, and did most contribute (not to curious Enquiries, for those I always avoided) but to the Honour of God and the good of Society. This has been my Method among you, and I verily believe that my Labours have not been unsuccessful: But as I am now call'd to the Care of another Parish; as I am now remov'd from you, (I mean only in Person, for my Affections and Concern for your Welfare will ever be present with you,) accept of my unfeigned and hearty Thanks for the Effects

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of my Labours among you, and for the many Inſtances of Good-will which I have met with from your Hands. May the ſame Spirit of Love and Union with one another, may the ſame Regard to the Cares and Endeavours of your Paſtor, remain with you from this Day forwards, that you may make my Succeſſor in this Place as happy, (and there is no ſmall Bleſſing to Him included in this Wiſh) I ſay as happy, as I have ever been among you: Endeavour, I beſeech you, (and if the high Degree of Affection which I have for you will allow me to be ſo bold in my Expreſſion) I charge you, as a Friend I charge you my Friends in the Words of St. *Paul* to the *Philippians*, that you *let your Converſation be as it becometh the Goſpel of Chriſt; that whether I come and ſee you, or elſe be abſent, I may hear of your Affairs, that ye ſtand faſt in one Spirit, with one Mind, ſtriving together for the Faith of the Goſpel*: then will you be Patterns to all thoſe who are round about you, Patterns worthy of their Imitation, worthy even of their Admiration: Unity and good Agreement among thoſe of the ſame Pariſh are ſo uncommon and ſo rarely ſeen, that a good Man cannot but be griev'd at the melancholy Sight: but for this Reaſon, thoſe with whom they are found will be more diſtinguiſh'd, and more applauded by the common Voice of Mankind: and I am ſure that it will ever be found true, that where there is Brotherly Love, Religion is there moſt likely to flouriſh. My Heart is ſo full of

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this Subject, that I could dwell long upon it, and with Pleaſure too, as recommending what I have ſeen the happy Effects of, during the courſe of my Miniſtry among you: but I forbear to ſay any more on a Point, which can ſcarcely be exhauſted; I leave therefore both you and this Subject with ſaying that even when my Tongue is ſilent, my Actions will always be ſpeaking my Gratitude to you; for he is a cold Requiter of Kindneſſes received, who employs only his Voice for that Purpoſe: but at preſent I ſhall conclude with putting up my hearty Prayers to Almighty God, that *Peace may be within your Walls, and Plenteouſneſs within your Houſes*; that the Bleſſings of this Life may attend all of you, but chiefly that you may hereafter receive *an inheritance amongſt all them which are ſanctify'd.*

Which God of his Infinite Mercy grant, for his Son Jeſus Chriſt's ſake, to whom, *&c.*

F I N I S.

MVSEVM BRITAN NICVM